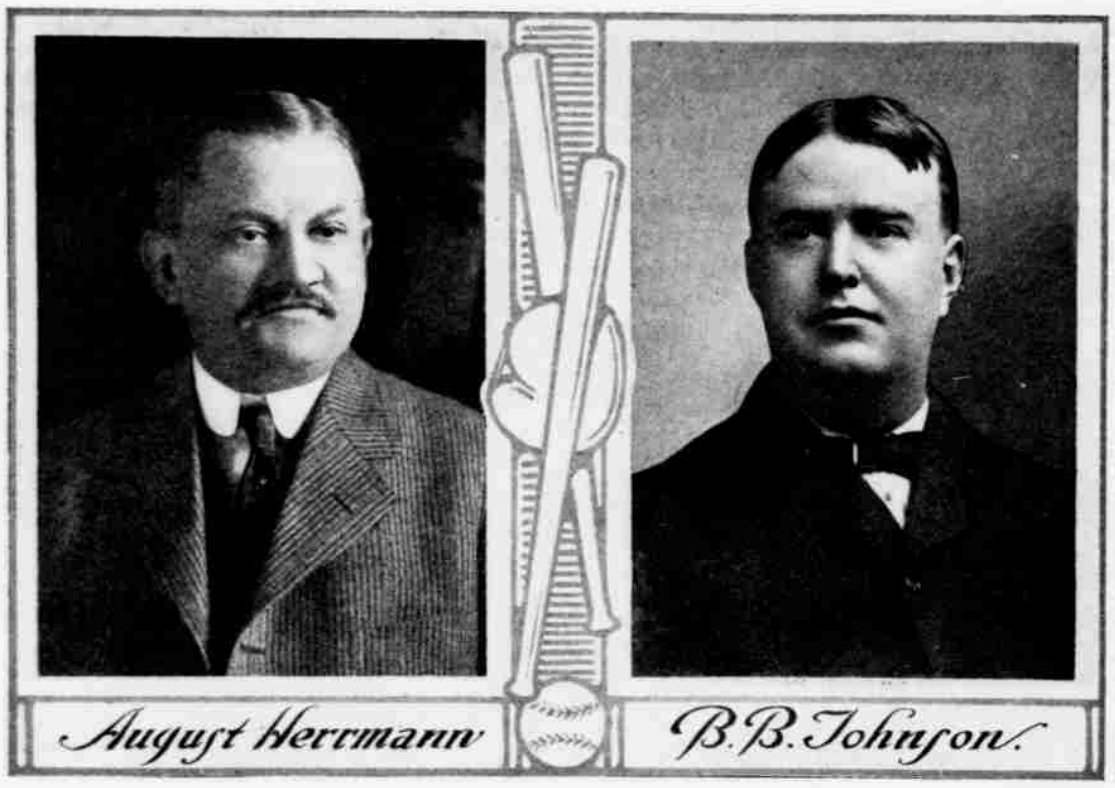
Where The Public Eye Looms Large

By A. Bart Horton



CINCINNATI has the faculty of producing big men, and she has exercised that faculty diligently. An occasional President, senators, congressmen, men who have shone in all walks of professional and business life, and "Gary" Herrmann and Ban Johnson. Probably no two men in these United States are better known or more deservedly popular. It has been my proud pleasure to have known both of these men, more or less intimately, for years, and I have watched their careers with interest.

In all the history of Cincinnati no one of her native sons has done more to bring her before the public eye than has "Gary" Herrmann. The nickname of "Gary," as bestowed upon him by his intimate friends in the days when he was a poor boy graduating from "printer's devil" to compositor, growing into a title of affectionate respect as he steadily mounted the ladder of fame, today is the nickname pre-eminent in the United States. The small boy at the country crossroads, the small boy in the city, and their older brothers, business men, professional men, men of national prominence, all know him. His reputation for being "square," for being absolutely honest and impartial in all his dealings, has become so firmly established that there is no one in the sporting world in general that would hesitate to accept him as a final arbiter in any dispute and who would not be perfectly satisfied with his decision. In fact, the position that he occupies as Chairman of the National Commission is almost startlingly unique. When this commission was established it was to consist of three members, the president of the National League and the president of the American League, and these two members were to meet and choose the third. It can be readily seen how much power lay in the hands of this third member, and how great was to be his influence over the destinies of our national pastime. The National League and the American League, the two great, powerful contenders in the baseball world, struggling to gain every possible vantage point over its rival, the one represented through Ban. Johnson and the other through Harry P. Pulliam, decided that the future of the national game absolutely required peace. Thus, the famous "peace compact" was entered into. Thus, a national commission was created to adjust all questions of differences and to absolutely control the destinies of baseball. It was an easy matter to decide who should represent the two major leagues, but to choose the third member—that was, indeed, a difficult problem. Yet it was satisfactorily solved, and let us hope, solved for a long time to come. "Gary" Herrmann was chosen. This was a tribute to him, indeed. The president of the American League and the president of the National League selected a man who was president of one of the National League clubs, and upon whom was to devolve the duty of deciding questions that might be of vital importance to his own club. That he has fulfilled these duties honestly and in the most upright manner and with absolute fairness is evidenced by the fact that for ten years he has been re-elected to that position. A few years ago after a strenuous fight, the National Bowling Tournament was held in Cincinnati, and the local association, requiring an executive head to manage this most important meeting, placed "Gary" Herrmann in charge. Under his able management the tournament was a success and so greatly impressed were bowlers from all over the United States with "Gary" Herrmann's personality that he was chosen as president of the national body. These, however, were not the only national honors conferred upon him, for that powerful order, the Elks, made him their Grand Exalted Ruler. In his own city he has held many positions of trust and was acknowledged by national experts to be one of the best posted men in the United States in municipal matters. During the construction of the Cincinnati Water Works he was president of the board in charge, from the start to the completion, and an impartial government engineer pronounced this undertaking to be one of the best and mosteconomically constructed water works systems in the world.

Ban Johnson's rise in the baseball world was not as meteoric as "Gary" Herrmann's, but no man in the baseball world has accomplished, single-handedly, as much. To his wonderful executive ability and his tireless energy was due not only the organization, but the wonderful success of the American League. I have known him since early boyhood. His dear old father was principal of the school in Avondale, one of the suburbs of Cincinnati, and his memory is held in respect and affection by many of Cincinnati's most prominent men, who were his boys. Ban Johnson was a pretty good ball player himself in his boyhood days and developed into quite a star collegiate pitcher. He adopted journalism as a career and for many years was sporting editor of the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette. Of his great ability in this line I can bear witness, for I was at that time on the staff of the same paper. The task he undertook in organizing the American League seemed almost staggering in its hopelessness. The National League, firmly cemented in public favor, having witnessed the downfall of several other contending leagues which, starting under the most favorable auspices, had proven expensive failures, seemed, indeed, a Goliath for this young David to tackle. Yet, step by step, with tireless energy, aided by a few loyal men, whose confidence and esteem he had won through an intimate knowledge of his great ability, he not only established the American League, but placed it on an equal basis before the American public with the National League.

Ban Johnson's ascendency in the baseball world was the result of a slow evolution, while "Gary" Herrmann leaped into prominence almost in a day. A number of prominent Cincinnati men, attending a business meeting in 1903, all lovers of baseball, were bemoaning the fact of the alien ownership of the Cincinnati club, for John T. Brush, of Indianapolis, was its owner.

"Why don't some Cincinnati people buy the club?" asked one.

"Probably because Mr. Brush wants too much money for it to be a good investment," was the answer.

"How much does he want?" This question could not be answered.

That coterie comprised not only men of wealth, but men who loved their native city, and it was then and there determined to buy the Cincinnati club irregardless of its income-earning value, but simply to bring the ownership home. The price paid was a large one for those days, and "Gary" Herrmann became its president. There was a merry war on at that time between the National and American Leagues, a war which involved all the minor leagues, and the evil effect it was having, both financially and otherwise, was only too apparent to him. Some immediate steps must be taken to avert these evils. The result was the National Commission.

I quote a few lines from a speech made by "Gary" Herrmann at the recent big baseball gathering in New York:

"Professional baseball has passed the period when it can be regarded solely as a sport and has, as conducted today, become an institution of our country. Its uplift and expansion began